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FM AMCONSUL JEDDAH
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1623
INFO RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH IMMEDIATE 8604
RUEHDH/AMCONSUL DHAHRAN IMMEDIATE 0175
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEHPH/CDC ATLANTA GA PRIORITY
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEHXX/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE
RUEHZM/GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 JEDDAH 000456

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/ARP, SE/S-O, CA/OCS/ACS-NESA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [AEMR](#) [ASEC](#) [CASC](#) [PGOV](#) [SA](#) [SENV](#)

SUBJECT: JEDDAH REGION FLOODING ON FIRST DAY OF HAJJ: 77
CITY RESIDENTS DIE

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11. (SBU) Summary: Media reported that flash flooding yesterday (November 25) in Jeddah killed 77 and stranded up to 1,000, especially in the poorer districts to the east and south of the city. Total casualty estimates may rise. Rain, a rare occurrence in this region and reported to be "the worst in 27 years," lasted from Wednesday morning into the early afternoon with reported rainfall of 140 millimeters (5.5 inches). The heavy rain caused extensive damage in Jeddah, a city without the infrastructure to support flooding, with one fear being the overflow of a sewage reservoir. Although the rain drenched many of the 2 million pilgrims on their first day of Hajj in Mecca, it seems the effect in the Muslim holy city was more limited. The next few weeks will be devoted to clean-up in Jeddah, with no further rain being forecast at this time. So far there have been no serious problems related to the flooding reported by any of the several thousand American citizens performing the pilgrimage, and all Mission staff are accounted for. End summary.

77 die in flooding

12. (U) The Jeddah Civil Defense Department and now Saudi TV is reporting that 77 people in Jeddah have been killed in the flooding (up from 13 and then 48 reported earlier). Most deaths were due to drowning, but some were the result of collapsing bridges or car accidents in the flooding. Rescue services reported 900-1,000 persons were stranded in houses inundated by water. Local government has moved some residents of affected areas to temporary housing in wedding and event halls and has deployed 120 rescue teams across the city, with water pumps and a thousand foreign workers to clean up the flood devastation.

Fears of sewage overflow

13. (U) Officials are warning of an overflow at "Misk" Lake, a waste dump of unprocessed sewage located in Guiza, 40 minutes northeast of the center of Jeddah. The lake is currently held back by a dam, but due to the rising water level, the Saudi Meteorological Agency fears a collapse of the dam, according to Arabic daily Okaz. Health officials are said to be working to avert a medical emergency.

Flooding caused devastation in Jeddah

¶4. (SBU) Since Jeddah lacks the infrastructure to support heavy rainfall -- inadequate or non-existent drainage systems and underground sewers and no means to keep water from residential areas -- the 5.5-inch rainstorm within a few hours caused extensive damage. Three bridges collapsed, roads were treacherous, and power was down for hours. ConGenOffs driving through Jeddah streets yesterday witnessed small streets and main thoroughfares flooded over the sidewalks, hundreds of stalled cars, and some impassable areas due to fallen signs, trees, and debris. The sister of a ConGen FSN was forced to retreat to the roof of her house with her family in eastern Jeddah as floodwaters inundated the rest of the residence. She was rescued and is currently living with family elsewhere in Jeddah, unsure of when she can return. Another ConGen FSN reported seeing a bus almost completely covered with water in an underground tunnel in the center of the city. Other contacts have described neighborhoods in Sulaimaniyah and other areas yesterday as resembling "car junkyards" and "flowing rivers."

Roadways closed for Hajj

¶5. (U) Due to the collapse of two bridges on the Jeddah-Mecca roadway, officials have been forced to open alternative routes for Hajj pilgrims traveling to the holy city. Although there are reports of some pilgrims being forced out of tents in Mina and into hotels and other nearby

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shelters due to rainstorms and flooding, damage in Mecca has not been comparable to that in Jeddah.

American citizens report few problems

¶6. (SBU) Post has been in contact with the major Hajj tour company for American citizens, Dar El Salam, which reports no serious problems with their pilgrims, other than the inconvenience and discomfort of getting soaked. No emergency calls from American citizens have been received thus far at the ConGen and the Embassy/Consulate pilgrims, CDC team, and a small DoD group are all reported to be fine. Ministry of Hajj authorities confirm there have been no deaths or injuries to Americans pilgrims. The Consulate in downtown Jeddah experienced minor flooding Wednesday but was able to host a Thanksgiving lunch for 60 host country contacts and staff without incident after clean-up crew was called in; about a dozen guests regretted due to the rain.

¶7. (SBU) Comment: With the weather forecast not calling for any more rain, the Jeddah Municipality will be working for the next few weeks on clean-up. By the afternoon of Thursday, November 26 (Thanksgiving Day in the U.S.), roads have already begun to dry, at least in the main areas and the more affluent parts of the city. Jeddah's airport has reported no flight problems aside from three diverted flights to Medina on Wednesday. The main challenge for the municipality will be moving displaced residents back into their flood-wrecked homes in the south and east of Jeddah. A potential health hazard will be standing water, a breeding ground for mosquitoes. End comment.

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